New and Notable for the 2013 MCAS-Alt

Please be aware of the following important information and changes for the MCAS-Alt in 2012–2013.

2013 MCAS-Alt Portfolio Submission

Portfolios must be prepared for submission and picked up for delivery from schools no later than **Monday, April 1, 2013.** A completed *MCAS-Alt Student Identification Booklet* (SIB) must be submitted for each student taking the MCAS-Alt. Materials and instructions for the completion and submission of MCAS-Alt portfolios, including three-ring portfolio binders, SIBs, and prepaid shipping materials, will be sent to each school in late February 2013, based on the number of requests received from each school in the online MCAS Enrollment Verification in early winter. Schools that do not receive these materials by March 4, 2013, should contact the MCAS Service Center at the number listed above.

Transition to 2011 Standards

Massachusetts schools are gradually transitioning to the 2011 Massachusetts curriculum frameworks. For the 2013 MCAS-Alt, the standards and domains in the **2011 mathematics frameworks** will be assessed according to the schedule shown in the Required Assessments for Each Grade section of this manual on pages 12–19. The Mathematics section of the *Resource Guide to the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks for Students with Disabilities* has been updated to reflect the 2011 mathematics curriculum framework for grades 3–8. The **ELA** and **science and technology/ engineering** (STE) standards described in the *Resource Guide to the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks for Students with Disabilities* (2006) will be assessed on the 2013 MCAS-Alt, transitioning to the 2011 ELA standards on the 2014 MCAS-Alt. The STE standards listed in the current Resource Guide (2006) will continue to be assessed on MCAS-Alt for the foreseeable future.

MCAS-Alt High School "Competency Portfolios"

The 2013 MCAS-Alt high school "competency portfolio" submission requirements remain the same as in 2012 (see pages 23–**30**).

Ensuring that Portfolios are Complete

A section was added to this manual describing the most common circumstances in which a score of "M" was given in a portfolio strand **(i.e., information was either missing or insufficient to determine a score)**, or an overall score of *Incomplete* was given in a content area. Educators whose portfolios received one or more of these scores are strongly encouraged to review this section (see pages 36–37).

Storage and Destruction of Portfolios Returned to Schools

A section has been added explaining the Department's policy on the recommended duration for schools to maintain returned student portfolios, and the required procedure to either destroy the returned portfolio or provide it to the parent (or student, if over 18) after the recommended duration of storage (see page 5).

Replacing AYP with a New Progress and Performance Index

A section was has been added describing the U.S. Department of Education's recent approval of the request by Massachusetts to waive certain provisions of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) law, including replacement of Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) with a new Progress and Performance Index (PPI) as the primary method of providing accountability determinations for districts and schools. All districts, schools, and subgroups will be expected to **reduce the gap by half** between

their level of performance in 2011 and proficiency for *all* students by the 2016-2017 school year in English language arts (ELA), mathematics, and science. The existing Composite Performance Index (CPI) will continue to be used to measure progress towards this goal (see pages 58–59).

MCAS-Alt Required Forms and Graphs
Teachers may use a computer-based application to complete the forms and graphs for their students' portfolios, available at www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/alt/resources.html. The digital format allows educators to complete these required forms on their personal computers and to print and include them, as appropriate, in each portfolio. The online Forms and Graphs program will be available only as a password-protected, web-based version that can be used on multiple computers. The download version will not be available. Forms from the *current* school year must be used since minor changes have been made to the 2013 MCAS-Alt forms and graphs. Forms and graphs may be completed manually using photocopies of the paper versions found in this manual (see pages 60–88).

Data Charts
Important information is provided on the creation of *data charts*, including identification of challenging and attainable *measurable outcomes* and development of appropriate instructional activities and brief descriptions, in the section entitled Guidelines for Collecting Student Data (pages 37–42).

"Grade-Level" Portfolios
The section on "grade-level" portfolio requirements has been clarified, in order to describe how students in grades 3–8 who are working at grade-level expectations, but require an alternate assessment, may earn a score of *Needs Improvement* or higher on the MCAS-Alt (pages 20–22).

MCAS-Alt Score Appeal
A request for an MCAS-Alt Score Appeal may be submitted if a teacher or administrator believes a discrepancy exists between the actual evidence in the portfolio and the reported score. In order to file a score appeal, the school must have retained a photocopy of the portfolio in question. Score appeals may be submitted anytime after preliminary MCAS scores are posted in mid-June and before 5:00 p.m. on Friday, June 28, 2013. Information on submitting MCAS-Alt Score Appeals is posted to www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/alt/results.html and is provided to principals with their shipment of MCAS-Alt submission materials in February.

Guidelines for IEP Team Decision Making: Which Students Should Take the MCAS-Alt?

A. MCAS Participation Guidelines

The decision as to whether a student will participate in an alternate assessment is made annually and in each subject by the student's IEP or 504 team.IEP and 504 teams should use the following guidelines at annual team meetings to determine how each student with a disability will participate in MCAS.

The student's IEP or 504 team should begin by asking the following questions and considering options 1, 2, and 3 in the chart that follows:

- Can the student take the standard MCAS test under routine conditions?
- Can the student take the standard MCAS test with accommodations? If so, which accommodations are necessary in order for the student to participate?
- Does the student require an alternate assessment? (Alternate assessments are intended for a very small number of students with significant disabilities who are unable to take standard MCAS tests, even with accommodations.)

The student's IEP or 504 team must make a separate decision for each subject scheduled for testing. A student may take the standard test in one subject and the alternate assessment in another. These assessment decisions should be reviewed, and may be revised, each time the team meets.

Characteristics of Student's Instructional Program and Local Assessment	Recommended Participation in MCAS
OPTION 1	

If the student is	*Then*
a) generally able to demonstrate knowledge and skills on a paper-and-pencil test, either with or without test accommodations; ***and*** is b) working on learning standards **at or near grade-level expectations**; ***or*** is c) working on learning standards that have been modified and are **somewhat below grade-level expectations** due to the nature of the student's disability,	The student should take the **standard MCAS test**, either under routine conditions or with accommodations that are consistent with the instructional accommodation(s) used in the student's educational program (according to the Department's accommodations policy available at www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/participation /sped.doc) and that are documented in an approved IEP or 504 plan prior to testing.

Characteristics of Student's Instructional Program and Local Assessment	Recommended Participation in MCAS

OPTION 2

If the student is	*Then*
a) **generally unable** to demonstrate knowledge and skills on a paper-and-pencil test, even with accommodations; ***and*** is b) working on learning standards that have been **substantially modified** due to the nature and severity of his or her disability; ***and*** is c) receiving **intensive, individualized instruction** in order to acquire, generalize, and demonstrate knowledge and skills,	The student should take the **MCAS Alternate Assessment** (MCAS-Alt) in this subject.

OPTION 3

If the student is	*Then*
a) working on learning standards **at or near grade-level expectations**; ***and*** is b) **sometimes able** to take a paper-and-pencil test, either without accommodations, or with one or more test accommodation(s); ***but*** c) has a **complex and significant disability** that does not allow the student to fully demonstrate knowledge and skills on a test of this format and duration, (Examples of complex and significant disabilities for which the student may require an alternate assessment are provided on the following page.)	The student should take the **standard MCAS test**, if possible, with necessary accommodations that are consistent with the instructional accommodation(s) used in the student's instructional program (according to the Department's accommodations policy) and that are documented in an approved IEP or 504 plan prior to testing. ***However*** The team may recommend the **MCAS-Alt when** the severity and complexity of the disability prevent the student from fully demonstrating knowledge and skills on the standard test, even with the use of accommodations. In this case, the MCAS-Alt "grade-level" portfolio should be compiled and submitted.

B. Other Complex and Significant Disabilities for Which a Student May Require an Alternate Assessment

While the majority of students who take alternate assessments have significant *cognitive* disabilities, participation in the MCAS-Alt is not limited to these students. When the nature and complexity of a student's disability present significant barriers or challenges to standardized testing, even with the use of accommodations, and even when the student may be working at or near grade-level expectations, the student's IEP or 504 team may determine that the student should take the MCAS-Alt in that subject.

In addition to the criteria outlined in Options 2 and 3 on the previous page, the following examples of unique circumstances are provided to expand the team's understanding of the appropriate use of alternate assessments. An alternate assessment may be administered, for example, in each of the following situations:

- A student with a severe emotional, behavioral, or other disability is unable to maintain sufficient concentration to participate in standard testing, even with test accommodations.
- A student with a severe health-related disability, neurological disorder, or other disability is unable to meet the demands of a prolonged test administration.

- A student with a severe motor, communication, or other disability requires more time than is reasonable or available for testing, even with the allowance of extended time (i.e., the student cannot complete one full test session in a school day).

High school students who participate in the MCAS-Alt may use this assessment to satisfy the CD requirement if they can demonstrate in their portfolio a level of achievement comparable to that of a student who has met the CD requirements by taking the standard high school test or retest in that subject. Students who meet these requirements on the MCAS-Alt will be eligible to earn a CD. More information on meeting the Competency Determination by taking the MCAS-Alt is available on pages 23–30.

H. Guidelines for Collecting Data on Student Performance

Getting Started

It may take time to find a method of collecting data that feels comfortable and is well-suited to the educator's style. Taking the time to understand the data collection strategies will encourage productive decision-making in order to complete the MCAS-Alt portfolio. The information can then be used to make informed *instructional* decisions that promote student learning. Whichever approaches are used, certain decisions must be made regarding the process of data collection.

Step 1. Clearly define the desired outcome related to learning standards in the subject.
Refer to the Resource Guide to the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks for Students with Disabilities (2006) in the subject and strand to be assessed.
Select a learning standard at the students enrolled grade.
If the student is not working at grade level, determine an "entry point" or "access skill" at a challenging but attainable level of complexity (see figures 3 and 4 on the following page)

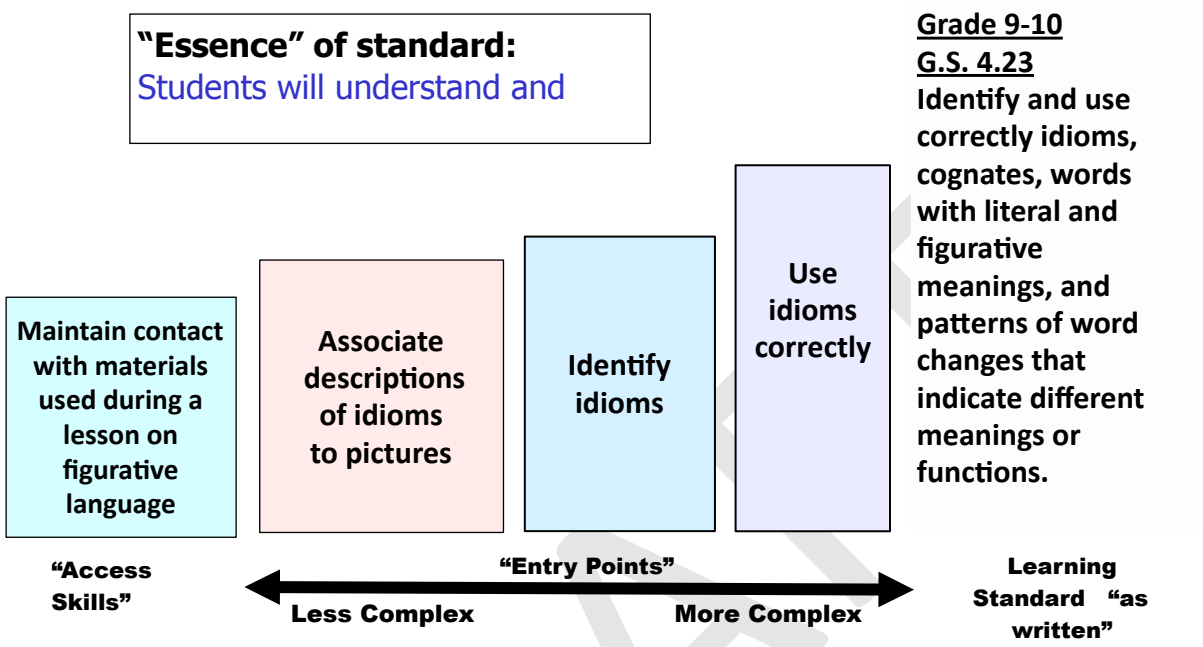
Consider the following:

- What knowledge and skills, based on the general education curriculum, must be taught to a student in this grade? What is the essence of the standard?
- What *single skill* based on a pre-assessment should be targeted for assessment? Where can the "entry point" be found in the required standard/strand?
- How will the level of complexity of the tasks be adapted and individualized for each student?

The *Resource Guide* should be used to determine academic goals that sufficiently engage and challenge each student. Figure 3 illustrates the standards-based developmental sequence of complexity on which the *Resource Guide* is based.

Figure 3.

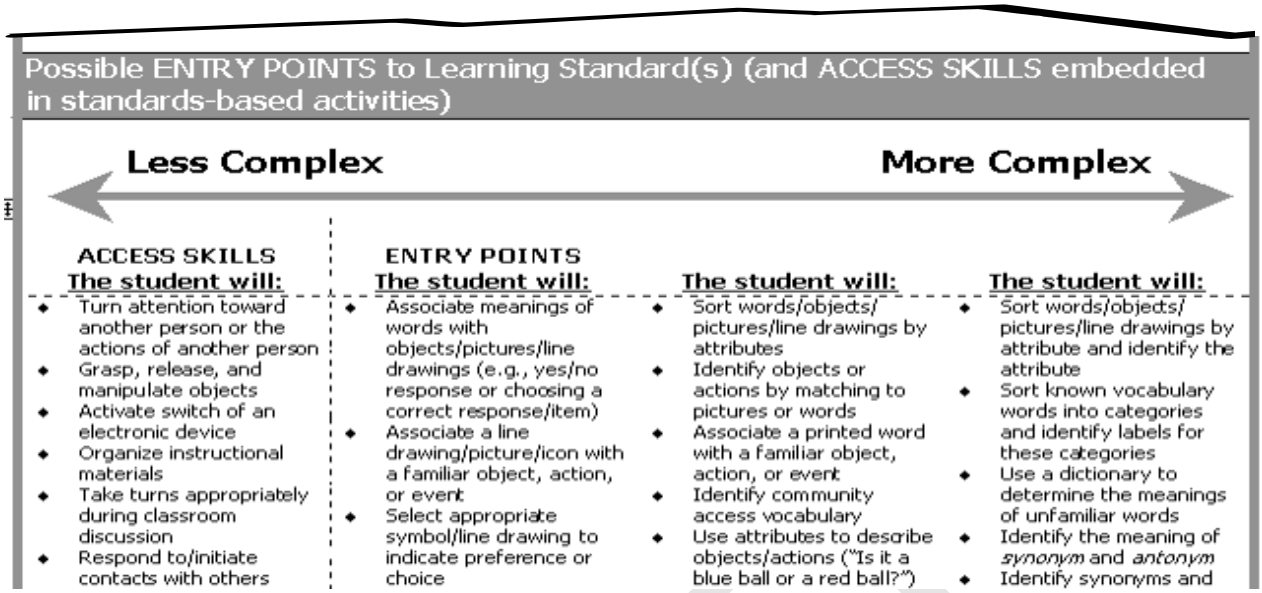
Accessing the "Essence" of English Language Arts - General Standard 4



Most students with significant disabilities will be able to access the "essence" of the standard through one entry point listed in the *Resource Guide*. However, a small number of students with the most complex and significant disabilities may not be ready as yet to address academic content directly, even at the lowest levels of complexity. In such cases, students may instead need to focus on goals that allow them to explore the tools, materials, and academic content by addressing targeted social, communication, and/or motor skills ("access skills") practiced **during a standards–based activity** (see Figures 3 and 4).

Figure 4.

Excerpt from the *Resource Guide to the Massachusetts Curriculum Framework for Students with Disabilities* (2006) for ELA General Standard 4



Step 2. Develop an observable, measurable, and individualized outcome.

- Determine what the student will be able to do in measurable, observable terms.
    - Does the outcome list a desired percent of accuracy and independence that would constitute sufficient mastery of the skill? The following outcome is stated in measurable, observable terms:
        - *"The student will complete two-digit multiplication problems with 80 percent accuracy and 100 percent independence."*
    - The following is ***not*** an *observable* skill:
        - "*The student will understand multiplication.*"
    - The following is ***not*** a *measurable* skill:
        - "*The student will improve his/her reading skills.*"
- Pre-testing will help determine the appropriate level of challenge (complexity) at which to begin assessing the skill.

The measurable outcome must assess a **single skill**. The data will be unclear when varied or multiple skills are included on the same data chart. **Note:** Learning standards and entry points may encompass either single or multiple skills. It is the teacher's responsibility to isolate one skill for assessment.

Step 3. Individualize the instructional approach.

Establish the types of prompts to be used during instruction. Also determine:

- accommodations (supports that allow the student to perform independently) and instructional adaptations (modifications) that may be needed
- where and when the instruction will occur
- who will be delivering instruction
- what materials will be used during instruction

Consider student preferences and past performance in determining the activities and materials that will increase the likelihood of success.

Step 4. Establish how accuracy and independence will be determined.

Upon completion of an entire activity, the teacher must calculate the overall percentages of accuracy and independence for all outcome-based activities on that date by averaging all values for accuracy, and averaging all values for independence.

Accuracy measures the proportion or percent of correct responses based on the number of possible total responses during an activity. Where possible, teachers are required to mark all incorrect responses so scorers can verify the percentage of accuracy.

Independence measures the proportion or percent of independent responses (i.e., responses given by the student without any prompt or assistance provided by the teacher that guides the student to give a correct answer) based on the number of possible responses during an activity.

- **Note:** *Any* prompting or assistance given to the student is considered a non-independent response in the calculation of independence; i.e., even a partial or low-level prompt is counted as a non-independent response. Hand-over-hand assistance should *always* be considered a non-independent response.
- Accommodations (i.e., independent supports) given to the student are not considered prompts for the calculation of independence.
- When independence is not easily calculated, such as for a writing activity or project, a scoring rubric specifically designed for this activity may be used. A sample scoring rubric for a writing activity is shown in Figure 5 on page 41. Include rubric with evidence if used.
- For additional information on calculating independence, see page 52.

The following example illustrates how to calculate the percent of accuracy and independence when a series of repeated activities (or trials) will be conducted.

Example: Each question below is considered a separate trial or activity. After each response, the teacher indicates whether the student's response was correct or incorrect (accuracy), and either independent or prompted (independence), as shown in the table below.

Measurable Outcome: The student will verbally respond to comprehension questions based on text read by the student with 75% accuracy and 75% independence.

Brief description: Student responded to five comprehension questions about a story read in class.

Question Number	*Accurate or Inaccurate*	*Independent or Prompted*
Question 1	Correct response (accurate)	*Verbal prompt (not independent)
Question 2	Incorrect response (inaccurate)	Verbal prompt (not independent)
Question 3	Correct response (accurate)	*Gestural prompt (not independent)
Question 4	Incorrect response (inaccurate)	Verbal prompt (not independent)
Question 5	Correct response (accurate)	No prompt (independent)
Overall Percent	60% accuracy (3 of 5 correct)	20% independence (1 of 5 independent)

***Note:** *Any* prompting or assistance given to the student is considered a non-independent response in the calculation of independence; i.e., even a partial or low-level prompt is counted as a non-independent response.

See Figure 5 on the following page for a sample scoring rubric that illustrates another way to calculate the overall percentages of accuracy and independence when it is not possible to use the approach described above (e.g., for scoring compositions and other writing assignments).

Figure 5.
Sample rubrics that could be used to score accuracy and independence for a classroom writing activity

Example 1:

Skill to be Assessed	25%	50%	75%	100%
Expression of Ideas (Accuracy)	Main ideas are unclear or unmatched to assignment.	Main ideas relate to the assignment and are somewhat clear.	Main ideas are clear, but not well supported by details.	Main ideas are clear and well-supported by details; information is accurate.
Independence	Overall, student required **extensive** prompts, cues, and other assistance to complete this assignment.	Overall, student required **frequent** prompts, cues, and other assistance to complete this assignment.	Overall, student was **somewhat independent** and required **some** prompts, cues, and other assistance to complete this assignment.	Overall, student was **mostly independent** and required **minimal** prompts, cues, and other assistance to complete this assignment.

Example 2 (Accuracy only):

Skill to be Assessed	25%	50%	75%	100%
Punctuation (beginning and ending) for a three-paragraph composition	Demonstrates little or no understanding of punctuation	Fewer than half the sentences included punctuation.	More than half of the sentences included punctuation.	Punctuation was used properly for all sentences.

(Adapted from www.rubistar.4teachers.org, www.thinkfinity.org; www.readwritethink.org.)

Step 5. Select an appropriate data collection format. Examples of each type of data chart are provided at the end of this section.

- ***Field data charts*** allow each response to be documented and are effective for collecting *response-by-response* data for several repeated tasks, trials, or activities conducted during a single session. Field data charts are also effective for tasks that do not yield tangible (i.e., paper-and-pencil) products, since the data collection process allows documentation of valuable and relevant information for each response. Field data are collected while the activity is conducted.
- ***Bar* and *line graphs*** summarize the student's performance of the same skill over a period of time. The student's performance can be measured by a series of activity sheet, written responses, or activities with a discrete end-product. For example: sequencing a series of tiles or geometric shapes. Data are usually summarized after the fact, based on a collection of tangible products (either work samples, photographs, or video samples). Bar and line graphs portray the student's entire performance "at a glance."

Step 6. Collect data on a regular basis.
Establish a consistent routine for collecting data. This will make it possible to note the trend in the student's performance and to make timely and efficient instructional changes that increase the likelihood of the student's success.

Remember to include a **brief description** beneath each data point that clearly describes how the student addressed the skill/outcome.

- What was the student asked to do?
- How did he or she do the activity?

One- or two-word descriptions will be *insufficient* to document the relationship between the activity and the measurable outcome and will exclude one or more data points from being scored.

Use one data chart for each assessed skill. You must begin a new data chart whenever the assessed skill has changed or become more or less complex.

Step 7. Monitor and analyze the data.
Review the data that has been collected on a regular basis and observe any trends in the student's performance. Consider the following:

- Is the student more successful with certain staff?
- Do different instructional materials alter the outcome?
- Is a pattern emerging?

Evaluate the progress the student has made to date on achieving the outcome using Table 2 below.

Step 8. Make instructional decisions based on the data review.
Consider the overall trend of the data in order to make instructional decisions after considering the following:

- Is the progress *slower* than expected? Perhaps the outcome should be changed or simplified.

Has the student made sufficient progress and *met the goal*? Perhaps the student is ready to begin addressing a new or more complex skill.

Table 2.
Three scenarios involving a student's progress and possible responses based on an analysis of the data

Trend of the Data Indicates:	Suggested Response(s):
1) Student is *not making effective progress* toward meeting the original outcome.	• Consider altering activity format or materials. • Make sure instruction is being delivered as intended. • If neither of the above is effective, consider lowering the complexity of the skill or changing to a precursor skill and begin a new chart.
1) Student is *making effective progress*.	• Continue teaching the skill.
1) Student has *met the goal* as stated in the original outcome.	• Begin teaching a new skill or the same skill at a higher level of complexity. • Begin a new data chart.

Conclusion

Data charts provide compelling evidence of a student's progress toward mastery of the targeted skill over time. When data are collected consistently and systematically, summarized clearly, and analyzed objectively, they can maximize instructional time and provide important evidence for the MCAS-Alt portfolio. Data charts, together with work samples, photographs, and video samples, provide tangible evidence of the student's achievements over time. See examples of completed data charts on the following pages.